

London Borough of Waltham Forest

Report Title	Physical Activity Mission – ‘Getting Waltham Forest Active: A million more days to do the things we love’
Meeting / Date	Cabinet, 2 December, 2025
Cabinet portfolio	Councillor Rosalind Dore, Portfolio Lead Member for Culture, Libraries, Sport & Leisure
Report author/ Contact details	Gemma Ryan, Assistant Director Sport, Leisure and Parks Neighbourhoods and Environment gemma.ryan@walthamforest.gov.uk
Wards affected	All
Public access	Open
Appendices	Appendix A - ‘Getting Waltham Forest Action: A million More Days’ strategy document Appendix B - Equalities Screener Appendix C – Sustainability Matrix



1. Summary
 - 1.1 This report seeks approval of the Physical Activity Mission, ‘Getting Waltham Forest Active: a million more days to do the things we love’.
 - 1.2 This mission has been developed to help address physical inactivity in the borough, where 25% of residents are currently considered as inactive, i.e. participate in less than 30 minutes of physical activity per week (Sport England Active Lives Survey, November 2024)
 - 1.3 Evidence shows that becoming active, i.e. taking up 150 minutes of physical activity per week can improve healthy life expectancy by up to 3-4 years (Vitality, 2025). Therefore, providing more healthy years for them to do the things they love with the people they love.
 - 1.4 Our mission “a million more days” will encourage all residents to be active but will specifically focus and provide targeted support for inactive people from three key identified cohorts.
 - 1.5 Our mission forms a central part of our overall strategy for sports and leisure for whole borough (which can be found in appendix A).

2. Recommendations

2.1 Cabinet is recommended to:

- 2.1.1 Approve the proposed five-year Physical Activity strategy and Council mission: 'Getting Waltham Forest Active: A million more days'.
- 2.1.2 Endorse the ongoing commitment to addressing inactivity as a driver of health inequalities.
- 2.1.3 Note the upcoming borough wide communications campaign 'Never in a Million Years' which sits under the portfolio of Libraries, Culture, Sports & Leisure.

3. Proposals

- 3.1 Our proposed mission aims to support inactive residents to become more physically active through access to the provision and redesigning the offer to suit their needs. There will also be a focus on how residents can build physical activity into their everyday lives, through small changes to behaviours and active travel.
- 3.2 We are starting in a strong place as Waltham Forest has a significant and broad universal and developing targeted sport, leisure and physical activity offer across the borough. This includes an excellent neighbourhood infrastructure through cycle and walking lanes and green spaces, leisure centres, sports facilities and targeted low cost and free physical activity sessions.
- 3.3 We will achieve this by focusing on three key cohorts – residents on low incomes, women in middle-age when activity levels dip, and older residents at risk of falls - will enable us to drive real change.
- 3.4 The strategy and mission concept have been presented to Scrutiny in September, 2025.
 - 3.4.1 Regular physical activity can have a significant impact on resident's lives, especially their health and wellbeing. The World Health Organisation states: "Regular physical activity is proven to help prevent and manage noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) such as heart disease, hypertension, stroke, diabetes and several cancers. It also helps to maintain a healthy body weight and can improve mental health, quality of life and well-being".
 - 3.4.2 There are clear guidelines and information provided by the NHS and World Health Organisation regarding the frequency and type of exercise required to reduce the risk of disease. The Chief Medical Officer recommends 150 minutes per week.
 - 3.4.3 Nationally a more active population is not only healthier but also impacts positively on the current costs of social care, mental health, dementia, and it is estimated to reduce GP visits nationally by 30 million a year.

The 2019 study by Sheffield Hallam University for Sport England showed that for every £1 invested in sport, £4 of value is returned.

- 3.4.4 We know that there is a direct correlation between deprivation, inactivity and poor health outcomes. People living in the UK's most deprived areas are twice as likely to be inactive (Sport England - Tackling Inactivity). The Resident Insights Survey shows that inactivity levels in the borough are higher for residents with lower incomes, those with long term disabilities, Asian residents (particularly Asian women) and Black residents (particularly Black women).
- 3.4.5 The Marmot Report – A Fairer, Healthier Waltham Forest (2022), highlights that some residents experience unfair and avoidable differences in their health because of where they live, their income, ethnicity, gender and other wider factors - the social determinants of health. There are inequalities in life expectancy of up to 7.6 years between some wards in Waltham Forest. This has been exacerbated by the recent cost of living crisis. Inactivity is a factor that can contribute to the presence of health inequalities in the borough.
- 3.4.6 The Marmot Report also showed that wider factors, such as living in a decent, safe and affordable home, having a strong social network, and access to sports and physical activity, play a vital role in shaping health.
- 3.4.7 Data from the Sport England Active Lives survey shows that a quarter (25%) of residents are inactive (less than 30mins of activity a week) and are not meeting the recommended levels of physical activity. Over the last the decade, the proportion of inactive residents has remained at around this level.
- 3.4.8 Inactivity levels in the borough are broadly in-line with national and London benchmarks and sit in the middle between the highest inactivity levels (Barking and Dagenham) 37%) and lowest Wandsworth (16.2%).
- 3.4.9 We have and excellent level of sport, leisure and physical activity facilities and infrastructure and active travel infrastructure in the borough. As well as a strong targeted physical activity offer and active travel infrastructure.
- 3.4.10 Summary of Current Offer:
- Sport & Leisure service targeted weekly offer nearly doubled in 12 months (20 to 37 to March 2025).
 - Sport & Leisure team and GLL provide 104 targeted activities available for all ages each week, including walking groups, free swimming, gentle exercise, football, basketball and cricket tailored sessions.
 - 67 activities are delivered or supported by GLL, 37 by the Council's Sport & Leisure Team
 - 38 of the sessions are supported by community partners.

- 39 different activity types are offered, with provision starting from ages 18 months.
- Free swimming is available for over 60, under 18's, people with a Disability and members of the armed forces.
- Our GLL contract is the best-performing in the country, generating surplus profits annually.

3.4.11 Our proposed mission aims to support inactive residents to access the provision and redesign the offer to suit their needs. Through consultation we are aware of some of the challenges and barriers people experience, including socio-economic, health, and accessibility.

3.4.12 Our Million More Days Mission will drive our response: focussing our resources on those that need it most, working in partnership internally and in the community and aligning with the Waltham Forest Mission to tackle inequality.

3.5 Our mission: "A million more days of healthy active life to do the things we love"

3.5.1 Over the next 5 years, this mission aims to support 1000 residents who are currently inactive to start doing 30 - 150 minutes of weekly activity so they can gain 1 million more days to spend on their favourite pastimes, with loved ones, doing things they love.

3.5.2 Research shows that doing even 30 minutes of weekly exercise can increase healthy life expectancy considerably.

3.5.3 Calculations for a million days are based on 1 in 20 of residents in lowest quintile who don't get 150mins of exercise per week starting to get active and research into the impact of physical activity on life expectancy by Vitality:

Residents in the borough 16+ (census):	222182
Percentage who are in the lowest IMD Quintile (approx)	20%
Number of residents in lowest IMD Quintile	44436

% of residents in lowest quintile who don't get 150mins of exercise / week (approx)	53%
No. of residents in lowest quintile who don't get 150mins of exercise / week (approx)	23551
1 in 20 of these residents =	1059.80814

Vitality LSE research: Approx. years added to life by getting 150mins / week	3
Days:	1095

If we can get 1 in 20 of these residents doing 150mins+ a week, collectively they would gain this many days of life:	1160490
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3.5.4 This goal is based on research in a study spanning seven years of 465,000 people carried out by Vitality, peer-reviewed by the London School of Economics.

The study found “those who went from an inactive lifestyle to an active one could reduce their mortality by up to 57%, which is equivalent to increasing their life expectancy by five years. The biggest improvements in life expectancy were seen in those who went on to be active five days a week, doing for example, a run or walking 10,000 steps. Notably, those who increased their activity levels by a lesser extent - getting active only one or two days a week - still increased their life expectancy, on average, by over two years, demonstrating that even small lifestyle changes can lead to significant health benefits.” ([Vitality](#), 2025)

3.5.5 Whilst the ambition will be to increase activity levels to the NHS recommended 150 minutes per week, the biggest health benefit is when going from 0 to 30 mins of activity.

3.5.6 We will work together with internal partners, such as public health; external partners; and community groups to address the barriers and reduce inactivity, supporting the improvement of healthy life expectancy.

3.5.7 We recognise that healthy life expectancy is affected by many social determinants, but physical activity can improve people’s health and well-being, feel more confident and enjoy a better quality of life.

3.6 Target Cohorts

The mission will initially target three priority key cohorts: 20% of residents with lowest income, women aged 45-55 (when physical activity often declines), age 65+ at risk of falls. Research show that people in the groups are more likely to be inactive or experience significant impacts of low physical activity levels.

3.6.1 Low-income residents: There is a direct correlation between deprivation, inactivity and poor health outcomes. People living in the UK’s most deprived areas are twice as likely to be inactive (Sport England - Tackling Inactivity). People in more economically disadvantaged groups are also less likely to take up physical activity interventions.

3.6.2 Middle-aged women: Physical activity levels and behaviours tend to lapse around the age of 45 due competing demands, daily structure and factors such as confidence. At the same time, women at this age experience a reduction in metabolic rate and menopause. In 2024, long-term sickness has become the top reason for women being out of the labour market, impacted by physical activity (Trades Union Congress, 2024). Staying active can help prevent long-term sick leave and future health issues.

- 3.6.3 Older residents: From the age of 65 the risk of falls increases, which can result in serious injury and loss of mobility. Research shows that physical activity significantly reduces this risk and help to improve health for maintaining daily activity and independence and for reducing risk of conditions such as heart disease and stroke (Sherrington et al, 2020).
- 3.6.4 As well as reducing existing health risk factors, the mission supports the overall prevention agenda. Focussing on these cohorts and supporting them to become more active, will help improve the health of residents as well as their healthy life expectancy. This will help to reduce the demand on local health services, intervention and care.
- 3.6.5 These priority cohorts will be monitored throughout the campaign, with the potential to review in the future and add additional groups.
- 3.7 Putting the mission into action
- 3.7.1 The council and GLL currently deliver numerous physical sessions across the borough at our own facilities, libraries and GLL leisure centres and many of these are aimed residents in our target cohorts, such as women's only sessions, sessions for older people and chair-based activities and are free or low cost.
- 3.7.2 Our current provision has a good level of engagement and participation in the sessions on offer by many residents. Refocussing some of our activities will help to address the barriers and challenged that our inactive residents experience. Further, a targeted marketing and communications campaign will ensure we reach residents in the identified cohorts.
- 3.7.3 We will carry out further engagement with those who are currently physically inactive to understand further the challenges and barriers to participation and refocus the provision accordingly. Interventions may include:
- Adjustments to sessions such as new timings that suit different lifestyles, holding activities in local and familiar community venues, promoting intro 'try-it-out' sessions.
 - Promoting ways to get active at home and outside of traditional 'exercise activities' for example gardening, or walking/cycling instead of taking the car. Working with VCS partners will open up more opportunities such as gardening and horticultural courses as OrganicLea.
 - Signposting to activities delivered and funded by the Active Travel programme, such as Cycle Sisters through the Walking and Cycling grant.
 - We may look to refocus some of the other offers we have across the borough to increase what is available and accessible to target cohorts.

- We will work closely with other parts of council and partners such as GPs to make sure they are aware of range of offers and understand referral pathways. We know that referral rates for GLL schemes from many GPs are low, by increasing these pathways we can give more residents the support they need.

3.8 Campaign: A Million More Days of Healthy Life

3.8.1 We already have an extensive and improving physical activity offer, but we need to better understand and address the reasons why some residents are not engaging with it. Communications will play a central role in identifying and targeting barriers, and in bringing opportunities to people's attention in ways that feel relevant and motivating.

3.8.2 We will launch a borough-wide campaign in January 2026, timed to coincide with New Year motivation. The campaign will encourage all residents to start getting active, with a specific focus on the three priority cohorts where targeted support will be most impactful (Low-income residents, Women aged 45-55, Residents aged 65+)

- The campaign will run in two strands:
 - A targeted intervention for 1,000 inactive residents in priority groups, using tailored messaging, trusted messengers, and cohort-specific channels
 - A universal borough-wide activation, including inclusive challenges, visible leadership, and place-based messaging to inspire movement across all communities
- Communications will be informed by audience research and delivered through a mix of digital and offline channels, including:
 - Persona development and focus groups
 - Social media campaign featuring local residents
 - GP/pharmacist referral packs
 - Locality-based posters and community activations
- There will be a strong emphasis on partnership working, with activations involving:
 - Local sports teams, e.g. Leyton Orient FC and AFC Leyton (for example: "Keepy Uppies with Leyton Orient")
 - Local nature groups like OrganicLea and Friends of Parks – gardening as movement (and reduction of isolation)
 - Faith groups and local influencers – culture-specific sessions, '10-minute moves' content
- The campaign will include borough-wide calls to action, including:
 - Finding out more on our website
 - Taking part in a challenge
 - Signing up to be an activity buddy
 - Leading or joining Feel Good Walks
- The campaign will also promote everyday activities that residents can build into their lives to increase physical activity levels, for example promotion of walking by highlighting how many steps can be achieved by walking to e.g. the next bus stop.

3.9 Getting Waltham Forest Active Together

3.9.1 The 'Million More Days' mission for tackling inactivity will be the focus of our five-year strategy. This sets out the Council's vision for promoting physical activity for all in the borough as well as continuing to deliver our excellent universal offer. [Appendix A]

3.9.2 In 2023 the preparatory work for a strategy was started which resulted in an Evidence Base document containing background research, details of engagement, recommendations and ideas for the direction of the Sports and Leisure offer in Waltham Forest. Whilst this was a thorough and detailed piece of work it resulted in a very broad strategy and set of opportunities; therefore, a more focused strategy and plan was required.

3.9.3 A review of this was undertaken in July 2025, including refining the Evidence Base input and aligning with Mission Waltham Forest. We have subsequently produced a 5-year document outlining our strategic approach to helping to address inactivity levels through our universal provision of great sport and leisure facilities, excellent commercial and asset management, inclusive programming, more targeted activity and working with communities to support all residents to be active.

3.9.4 The strategy sets out our vision for "a borough where everyone can lead active, healthy and fulfilling lives" and is organised around three themes:

1) Active Places – creating neighbourhoods where everyone has space to move, play and connect.

2) Active Lives – Helping more people feel welcome, supported and motivated to get moving.

3) Active Communities – Working alongside our communities to shape, deliver and sustain a more active borough

3.10 Measuring Success

Metric	Baseline
Activity rates from Sports England and RIS	Inactive: 25% (Sports England active lives)
Walking and cycling levels	Walking: Over-65s (66%) Lowest income residents (58%) Cycling: Over-65s (~1%) Lowest income residents (8%) Women (11%)
Number of targeted interventions for specific cohorts	Free activities (proxy for low-income accessibility): 39

	Activities targeting middle-aged women: 5 Activities targeting older adults (65+): 32
Number of new participants for activities	<i>Measured by activity leaders during campaign in January</i>

3.11 Engagement

3.11.1 A mission-led approach means working collaboratively and a shared responsibility with colleagues from other teams and through partnership with external stakeholders.

3.11.2 We have engaged with internal teams including Public Health and Stronger Communities who have been briefed, provided feedback and are supportive of the approach.

3.11.3 During the initial strategy development stage a thorough consultation exercise was undertaken, this included:

- Residents Survey, 270 responses
- 5 focus groups
- Sports Clubs Survey, 42 responses
- School Survey, 20 responses

Insights from this engagement provided the foundation for the strategy and has informed the priorities.

3.11.4 A resident focus group has been held to feedback on the campaign concepts.

3.11.5 Further ongoing engagement is planned as part of the mission development. We will work with GLL, Sport England, activity session leaders, faith groups, schools VCS groups (Joy Riders, Age UK, Waltham Forest Women's Network) and NHS colleagues to help define next steps and design of the campaign. We intend to engage with a range of partners over the Autumn to gain their support for our January Campaign and mission focus.

4. Options & Alternatives Considered

4.1 An alternative option is to do nothing and continue business-as-usual.

4.2 This is not recommended: if we do not develop and implement a Physical Activity Strategy it is likely that those who are inactive will remain so and inactivity levels could potentially increase.

5. Council Strategic Priorities (and other National or Local Policies or Strategies)

- 5.1 This proposal supports the Mission Waltham Forest corporate strategy to tackle inequality, and directly supports progress on the following missions: 'make Waltham Forest a great place to live and age well' and 'safe, green neighbourhoods where everyone can thrive'. The strategy is in line with the National Government 'Get Active Strategy' which aims to increase physical activity by making sport and leisure more accessible, inclusive and sustainable.
- 5.2 The proposals support the key outcomes in the following regional and national strategies to address inactivity:
- Central Government – 'Get Active: a strategy for the future of sport and physical activity' (2023-2030).
 - Sport England – 'Uniting the Movement' (2021-2031)
 - London Sport – 'Let's Move London' (2024-2027)

6. Consultation

- 6.1 Community and resident consultation was carried out. Ongoing engagement and consultation with residents and local partners will be undertaken to shape delivery.
- 6.2 The Climate Scrutiny Committee considered the issue on 11th September 2025.

7. Implications

7.1 Finance Implications

- 7.1.1 The mission will be delivered within the existing Sports and Leisure Services budget, which includes a general fund position of –£0.625m (net contributor). This budget is primarily supported by external income generated through leisure centres, sports facilities, and youth centres. Delivery will focus on realigning and redesigning current provision to better meet residents' needs, with no additional funding required.
- 7.1.2 The council will leverage its existing infrastructure, workforce, and strategic partnerships. Particularly with its Leisure Centres contractor and Leyton Orient, to implement the programme efficiently. This approach ensures a cost-effective solution while maintaining high-quality services for the community.

Value for Money

- 7.1.3 The proposals offer strong value for money by enhancing outcomes without additional investment. National evidence shows that investment in sport generates social value. Locally, expanding targeted activities has already increased engagement. By focusing on high-need groups, the mission is expected to reduce demand on health services and support the council's prevention agenda. The strategy also positions the council to attract external funding from bodies like Sport England by aligning with national priorities.

Risks

7.1.4 The main risk is that inactivity levels may persist or worsen, especially among vulnerable groups facing barriers such as low income, cultural factors, and limited access. Without targeted intervention, health inequalities could deepen. To mitigate this, the council will use tailored messaging, community engagement, and improved referral pathways. Collaborating with trusted local partners will help reach underserved audiences and ensure the campaign is inclusive and impactful.

7.2 Legal

7.2.1 There are no legal implications identified.

7.3 Equalities and Diversity

7.3.1 An Equalities Impact Assessment was completed on 20th August 2025. The main findings are that positive impacts may be experienced for groups with protected characteristics age, race, sex and disability. Otherwise, no negative impacts have been identified. The full Equalities Impact Assessment is appended.

7.4 Sustainability (including climate change, health, crime and disorder)

7.4.1 The Physical Activity Strategy and mission work has direct implications for public health and is targeted at reducing inactivity in the borough, with a particular focus on support those residents most in need. Evidence shows that increased physical activity has significant positive impact on many health conditions, wellbeing and overall quality of life.

7.4.2 Engagement in sport can protect against vulnerability to crime, including reducing children's involvement in violence. Our local sport and leisure offer recognises the value of sport and physical activity in engaging those most vulnerable to crime and violence, for example, through work with local leisure providers and VCS partners to provide free community sports and leisure activities to young people most at risk of violence.

7.4.3 There are positive ties to climate action through this work including increasing active travel and promoting activities in our green spaces. Our mission to lead the way for a net-zero borough recognises the need for improving access to nature, improving air quality and encouraging more active travel, while in turn will provide the conditions for increasing physical activity levels.

7.5 Council Infrastructure

7.5.1 NA

Background Information (as defined by Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985)

NA